

697
6

The Design of Christianity.

A

694.9.22.
6

S E R M O N

Preach'd before the

Q U E E N

A T

St. James's Chappel

O N

C H R I S T M A S - D A Y, 1704.

By the most Reverend Father in God,
John Lord Archbishop of Y O R K.
Sharp

Published by Her Majesties Especial Command.

L O N D O N:

Printed for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Bishop's Head* in *St. Paul's*
Church-Yard, and *William Rogers* at the *Sun* in *Fleetstreet*,
MDCCV.

The Design of Christianity.

A
SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN



St James's Chapel

ON

CHRISTMAS-DAY, 1704

By the most Reverend Father in God,
JOHN W. Lord Archbishop of York

Preached by Her Majesty's Special Command.

LONDON:

Printed for Wm. Knap, at the Bishop's Head in St. Paul's Church-Yard, and William Rogers at the Sun in Fleet-street.

MDCCLV

[1]

of the Devil. So that the Works of the Devil are
all manner of sin and wickedness: and conse-
quently the destroying out of Mankind all sin and
wickedness, and in the place thereof planting in
them all manner of Virtue and Holiness. And this
the Apostle here affirms to be the great End of Christ's

SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN.

John III. 8.

*For this purpose was the Son of God
manifested, that he might destroy the
Works of the Devil.*

WHAT is here meant by the Works
of the Devil, is plain from the for-
mer part of the Verse. *He that
committeth Sin (saith the Apostle) is
of the Devil, for the Devil sinned from the begin-
ning; and then it follows, for this purpose was the
Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the Works*

of the Devil. So that the Works of the Devil are all manner of Sin and Wickedness; and consequently, the *destroying of the Works of the Devil* must mean the destroying out of Mankind all Sin and Wickedness, and in the place thereof planting in them all manner of Virtue and Holiness. And this the Apostle here affirms to be the great End of Christ's coming into the World.

It is the same Account of Christ's Undertaking in other words that St. Paul gives us in the 2d to Titus, Christ therefore gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purifie to himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works. And the same account likewise that St. Peter gives of it in the Third of the Acts, Unto you first (saith he) God having raised up his Son Jesus, (that great Prophet whom God by Moses promised to raise up to his People) hath sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his Iniquities. Lastly, It is the same account that Zacharias gives us of the design of our Lords coming into the World in the First of St. Luke, Namely, That we being delivered from the hands of our [Spiritual] Enemies, might serve God without fear, in Holiness and Righteousness before him all the days of our Life.

It were to be wished, that this was more considered and lay'd to heart by all of us that profess to be Christ's Disciples. If it was, it would be impossible for many of us to lead such lives as we do, without the utmost confusion, and the continual reproaches of our own Consciences. But whilst other sorts of accounts have been taken up concerning

cerning Christs Undertaking, and the design of his Religion, so different from that which my Text, and the other Passages I have quoted do give of it: Whilst Men have represented our Saviour to themselves, as one that was sent rather to free them from the Punishment of their Sins, than from the Power and Dominion of them; as one that came not so much to make them really righteous in their own Persons, as to impute his own Righteousness to them; and to fulfill the Law of God for them, rather than to oblige them to a more strict Obedience to it: Whilst they have been willing to look upon his Gospel, not as a practical Institution to teach us, and oblige us to live well, or as the means appointed by God for the reforming the Manners of Mankind; but only as a Systeme of Propositions to be believed and professed, together with some few outward Precepts to be practised by us, in order to the distinguishing us from the rest of the World: Whilst I say, we have entertain'd such Notions as these concerning the Religion of our Lord Jesus Christ; it is no wonder that it hath no greater effect upon Mens lives, than we see it has at this day, but is become a barren evanid ineffectual thing, a matter of Words and Dispute, a mere piece of Book-learning, a Name to distinguish Parties by, and little more.

Give me leave therefore at this time, and on this day, on which we are met to commemorate the Son of God's being manifested in the Flesh, to discourse to you of the great End and Design of this his Manifestation, as it is here declared to us by his Apostle. This I am sure, as it is a proper Argument

for the Season; so if it be well considered, it will effectually keep us from placing our Christianity in such things as we see Men commonly do; and will oblige us above all things, to a serious and hearty endeavour after universal Virtue and Sanctity; it being certain that the planting of this in us, and the *destroying* out of us all Sin and Wickedness, which are the proper *Works of the Devil*, was the great End of Christs coming into the World, and of the Religion which he set on foot among Men.

This is the Point therefore that I shall endeavour to make out at this time. And in order to the so doing, it will be sufficient to shew these two things.

First, *That this was an End and Design most worthy of the Son of God to propose to himself in his Undertakings for Mankind.* And Secondly, *That the History of our Lord, and the Religion he instituted, do all along, throughout the whole Structure and Contrivance of them, visibly express such a Design.*

I begin with the first, That to deliver Men from the Bondage of their Sins, and to restore their Natures to a State of Virtue and Holiness, was a design most worthy of the Son of God to propose to himself in his Undertakings for Mankind. Now the truth of this will appear, if we either consider how necessary, how essential, an Ingredient Holiness is into the Happiness of Mankind; or on the other side, how impossible it is in the nature of the thing, for any Man to be happy that is under the Power and Dominion of Sin: For from hence

It will be evident, that if our Saviours Errand into the World, was to serve the Interests of Mankind, he could propose no design to himself more glorious, more worthy of the Son of God, than this that we are speaking of.

And first let us see how much a holy Divine frame of soul, contributes to our Happiness. I pray what doth the chief Happiness of any Being consist in; but in these two things: In having its Nature advanced to the greatest Perfection it is capable of; and Secondly, in being put into the possession of the greatest good it can enjoy. Let us now apply this to Mankind. And First, I ask, what is the highest Excellence and Perfection that Human Nature is capable of? Is it not to be made as like unto God as is possible? There is no doubt of it. The measure of all created Excellency and Perfection, can be nothing else but the Divine Nature, which is Perfection it self; and therefore the nearest approach that any Nature can make to that, is a state of the utmost perfection that that Nature can arrive to: But now there is nothing in the World by which we can approach nearer unto God, nothing that can give us a greater resemblance of his Nature, than those Moral Accomplishments of the Mind we are speaking of, that is to say, universal Purity and Righteousness and Goodness. For as on the one hand, these are the things that constitute the very Being of the Divine Life, and are (if one may so speak) the top, the flower of all the Perfections that are in Gods Nature: So on the other hand these are the only qualities in which it is possible for Mankind to imitate him. Our Natures will.

will not admit that we should be Infinite, Independent, Omnipotent and Omniscient as God is : But we may be, nay, we are commanded to be Holy, as God is Holy, Merciful as God is Merciful, and perfect in the inward Goodness and Rectitude of our Minds, as our Heavenly Father is perfect. That is the first thing,

And then, *Secondly*, as for the being put into the possession of the greatest Good we are capable of, which is the other part of the chief Happiness, and without which indeed all Excellency of Nature would not signify very much ; forasmuch as no Creature, how excellent soever, is Self-sufficient : As for this I say, I ask again, whether there can be a greater Good than God ? If not, then, whether he that is put into a condition of enjoying God be not put into the possession of the greatest Good he is capable of ? It certainly must be granted. But now I say, it is true Holiness and Goodness only that can put Mankind into a Capacity of enjoying God ; nay, not only so, but doth put those that are endowed with it into an actual Enjoyment of him. [In some degree in this Life, but in Fulness and Perfection hereafter.] For pray, wherein consists the Enjoyment of God ? Doth it not consist in loving him with all our Heart, and Soul, and Strength, and rejoycing in the sense of his Love to us ; in being inwardly and powerfully affected with his Presence, with his Goodness, with all his Excellencies ; and in a word, in having one Mind and one Will with him ? But what is all this, but either the very Essence, or the proper and natural Exercise of that Holiness and Goodness we are now discoursing of ?

As

As therefore before we saw that true Holiness makes us like unto God: So by what has been now said, we see that it inseparably unites us to him; and thereby makes that inexhausted Fountain of all Good to be as much ours as our Capacities will admit of. And still the more holy, the more pure, the more devout we grow, still we shall more and more enjoy God, and so for ever and ever.

There needs no more to be said for the shewing how necessary, how essential true Goodness is to the Happiness of Mankind. I do not here say that this alone will make a Man compleatly happy: For Human Nature being made up of Soul and Body, there must be a great many other things taken care of besides the Holiness and Purity of the Mind, in order to the rendring that compound which we call *Man* entirely happy. And the providing for these likewise was one part of our Saviour's business in the World. But seeing the main things required to our Happiness are those we have been speaking of, it was necessary that he should in the first place provide for them. And therefore with good reason do we say, that that was the first and great Design of his coming, namely, to restore the Image of God in fallen Mankind.

But for the farther clearing of this Truth, let us, in the *Second* place, turn our Thoughts to the state of Mankind as they are under the Power and Dominion of Sin; and see whether so long as they continue in that state, it be not impossible for them to be happy, tho' there was no other Punishment to be dreaded from their Sins, but only such as ariseth from the Sins themselves. Sin

Sin is an infinite Imperfection, and therefore an infinite Evil. It is the worst Corruption and the greatest Debasement of Human Nature that is possible, and the farthest recession in the World from the Divine Perfections, from their approach to which all other Perfections have their Name and Estimate.

It is truly *ἡμετέριος ἁμαρτία* "A Sin, as one of the Philosophers calls it, a perfect lapse into Brutality; a state of flat contradiction to God.

It is evil pure and unmixed; no Circumstance in the World can make it in any sense good, whereas all other Evils so reputed may be so circumstantiated, as to have some mixture of Goodness or Commendableness in them.

It is that which puts Mankind into an utter Incapacity of ever enjoying the Supreme Good, which no other Evil can do. For it is not more impossible (as the Apostle expresseth it) for *Light to have communion with Darkness*, than for *God to have fellowship with Belial*. For tho' we should suppose a wicked Person, a Whoremonger for instance, a Worldling, a malicious, profane, or irreligious Person, to have all his Sins forgiven him; and not only so, but to be compassed about, and (as I may say) gilded over with all those external Glories, in which we do believe good Men shall shine in the Life to come; nay, and farther, to have an excellent Understanding given to him, so as that he was able to reach the height of Seraphims in his sublime Contemplations: Yet so long as that wicked Nature

ture remains in him, he would not for all this be a whit nearer to the enjoying of God; forasmuch as there can be no Enjoyment, where there is no Love, no Likeness of Nature, no Union of Mind. Nay, I know not whether these Circumstances we have placed him in, (supposing such Circumstances compatible to such a Man) would not make him more miserable than otherwise he would be. For the Excellency of his Understanding, and those external Glories would not suffer him to doubt, but that the Greatest good was to be had in God: Yet through the perverseness of his Nature he would find, that this Good would be so far from being a Good to him, that it would be the greatest of Evils: Forasmuch as there was the most infinite unsuitableness, and disagreement between the Object presented to him, and his Faculties, that were to be exercised about it.

What shall I say more? As Goodness is Health, so Sin is Sickness and Death: The worst abuse of our highest Faculties, a state of violence to Nature. 'Tis all that we call Unreasonableness, Confusion, Deformity, Monstrosity. In a word, it is the greatest of all Evils, as being at the greatest distance from the greatest Good.

So that these things considered we may reasonably conclude, that if Christ had any design to make us happy; nay, if he had any design to make us not miserable; it was necessary for him to redeem us from the slavery of Sin, and to restore our Natures to their primitive Rectitude, by making us virtuous and good.

C

How

How inconsiderate then, how unreasonable are those Men, that would make the ultimate End of our Saviour's Undertaking, to be the freeing Men from the punishment of their Sin, and the entitling them to eternal Happiness, without any respect had to the change and renewing of their Natures. For in the first place, from what hath been said, it is easie to see, how very much they do hereby disparage the love and kindness of our Saviour, and lessen his Undertaking. For whilst they make him only to have redeemed us from his Father's Wrath, and the Punishments consequent thereupon, leaving us in the mean time to the impurity and corruption of our Natures, which of it self, without the accession of any external Evil is a Misery great enough; they do but make him half a Saviour: One that freed us indeed from some outward Evils, but left us irremediably exposed to many inward ones as great, or greater, than the other. One that deliver'd us from the apprehensions of a Gibbet or an Executioner, but could not, or would not cure us of the intolerable Fevers and other Distempers under which we fatally languished.

Secondly, It is easie to see likewise how absurd a Notion these Men have of Happiness. For whilst they make a Man under the Power and Dominion of Sin, capable of the happiness of the other World, which chiefly consists in the fruition of God's Excellencies and Perfections, they do in effect affirm, that a Man may be made happy by that, of which he hath no sense, no perception at all; or rather, to speak properly, by that to which he hath the greatest

greatest Aversion and Antipathy. But in true speaking, Heaven to such a Man, (I am sure that Heaven that is promised in the Scripture) would be so far from being a place of Happiness, that, bating the corporeal Pains, it would in all respects be Hell it self.

Nor will it here help the matter, to say, that the Righteousness of Christ is imputed to all Believers; and that by virtue thereof, they are to all intents and purposes made righteous, even as much, as if they were righteous in their own Persons: I say, this will not help the matter. For so long as Sin and Wickedness are not mere Names, but real things, and have their immutable Properties: let Christ's Righteousness be never so much imputed to us, yet so long as they remain in us, they will be Evils, they will make us miserable, they will put an eternal Bar to our enjoyment of God. And we can no more hope to remedy this, by the imputation of anothers Righteousness, than a blind Man can hope to see by the Eyes of another; than a Man in the fit of the Stone or Gout, can hope to find ease by the help of his Physician; than a crooked deformed Person can hope to be made straight and beautiful by the comeliness of his Friend.

But to come to our second Head of Discourse. As the destroying the works of the Devil from among Men, and the making them sincerely righteous, and holy, and good, was a design most worthy of the Son of God to undertake: So, in the second place, his whole transactions upon Earth, and the Religion he set on

foot in the World, were so contrived in every part of them, as to be a manifest pursuance of this design.

This is the second thing I am to speak to, and for the making it good, there needs no more to be done, than only to desire any Man to cast his Eyes, either on the Precepts which our Lord delivered; or on the Doctrines he taught; or on the Life he lead; or on the Death he suffered; or lastly, on what he hath been doing for Men at the right hand of God ever since: All which taken together, do make up the entire History of our Saviour, and the whole Scheme of his Institution. If now it do appear, that the natural tendency of every one of these was to make Men good; and that that was the end they all aimed at; then I hope our Proposition is sufficiently proved.

To go over all these particulars at this time, would prove too great an exercise of your Patience, which I would not willingly injure; and therefore I shall confine my self to the three first of them, and those too I shall treat of very briefly and generally.

And first of all, that this was the design of all our Saviour's Precepts, and the Laws that he gave us, is evident beyond contradiction. There is not one of them which is not either an Injunction of some moral Virtue, or a prohibition of some Vice, or a recommendation of the means by which some Virtue is to be acquired, or some Sin to be mortified.

What

What ever other liberties the Gospel may have indulged unto Men, it is certain it grants none to their Vices. Never was Virtue taught in such Perfection, or exacted with such Severity, as we there find it. Never did any Man set the duties of Human Life in all its relations, towards God, towards our Neighbours, and towards our selves, at so high a pitch, as our Saviour hath there set them. All the Gentile World cannot shew us, out of all their great Masters of Morality, their most refined Philosophers, such a Collection of sublime and accurate Precepts of Living, as are delivered in one single Sermon of our Saviour's. That, I mean, upon the Mount.

So far is he from giving countenance to any sort of Wickedness or Impurity in the practices of Mankind, that he hath forbid all the tendencies and approaches to it in the very Thoughts; having put restraints upon the most secret and undiscernible workings of our minds towards every thing that is evil. *To look upon a Woman to lust after her,* is in his account to commit *Adultery*. *To be rashly and uncharitably angry,* is forbid by him as a degree of *Murder*. Not to forgive an Injury, is by his Law a Sin, as well as to do one.

I own that there is the greatest encouragement given by our Saviour to all repenting Sinners, that is possible; nay, though they have been the greatest of Sinners. But then he requires both a thorough change of their Minds, and a thorough reformation of their Manners too, before they must hope for any benefit from him. I own

I own likewise, that there is in the Gospel all the allowance made for the natural unavoidable frailties and weaknesses of Mankind, that can be desired. But then it supposes, the Persons to whom this allowance is made, to be sincerely (tho' not perfectly) pure and upright both in their Minds and Lives; that they harbour no Iniquity in their Hearts, nor practise any known Sin in their Conversation; nay, and that they do their best endeavours likewise to overcome their very infirmities.

In a word, it is the fundamental Law of the Gospel, that *without Holiness no Man shall see God*; and all the particular Precepts we there meet with, do exactly answer this general one, and are a pursuance of it.

Nor, in the second place, is this design of making Men virtuous more conspicuous in our Saviour's Precepts, than in the Doctrines he delivered to Mankind. Those truths (I mean) which he revealed from God to be believed by all those that should Embrace his Religion. There was none of them calculated for the gratification of Men's idle Curiosities, the busying and amusing them with airy and useless Speculations. Much less were they intended for an exercise of our Credulity, or a tryal how far we could bring our Reasons to submit to our Faith. But as on one hand, they were plain and simple, and such as by their agreeableness to the rational faculties of Mankind, did highly recommend themselves to our belief; so, on the other hand, they had an immediate relation to practice; and

and were the genuine Principles and Foundations upon which all Human and Divine virtues were naturally to be superstructed.

The Doctrines which our Saviour delivered, will all of them fall under *one of these three Heads.*

They were either in order to the clearing, improving and confirming the great Truths of natural Religion, without which a virtuous holy Life could not be lead.

Or they were in order to the removing of those erroneous wicked Principles out of the Minds of Men, that then commonly prevailed in the World, and were great hindrances and obstructions of true Virtue and Piety.

Or lastly, they were such as contained new Arguments, new Encouragements, new Engagements to put us upon the practice of Holiness, that Mankind never thought of before. And of this last sort were those Doctrines which we call the peculiar Articles of the Christian Faith; as namely, the infinite love of God to Mankind expressed in sending his own Son for their Redemption: That Son of God's offering up of himself as a Sacrifice for the Sins of the World, and thereby sealing a Covenant of Pardon and Reconciliation to all true Penitents that believe in him: That Son of God's being afterwards raised from the Dead, and carryed up into Heaven to appear there as a perpetual Advocate and Intercessor for us at the right hand of God; and at the same time sending down his Holy Spirit, as his Vice-

Vicegerent upon Earth, to maintain and promote his Cause and Religion in the World; and by his inward Influences, to assist all Christ's faithful Disciples in their endeavours after Virtue: And lastly, that Son of God's coming down again from Heaven at the end of the World, to judge both the quick and the dead, according to their works done in the Flesh; and to reward all good Men with eternal Life and Happiness, and to punish all bad Men in Hell-fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels.

This now is the sum of those Doctrines that were delivered by our Saviour, and as to all, and every one of them, I ask whether they be not truly practical Doctrines? Whether the whole scope and design of them be not to make Men good? Nay, lastly, whether in these Doctrines there be not a more powerful, a more effectual method laid down for the reforming Human Nature, and obliging the whole World to forsake their Sins, and to lead holy and virtuous Lives, than was ever taught before; nay, or then was possible to have been contriv'd by all the wit of Mankind?

By what I have now said, it plainly appears how groundless the pretence of those Men is, who would explode the Doctrine of the Blessed *Trinity* out of the Christian Religion, as being a mere Metaphysical Speculation, and nothing at all tending to the promoting of Piety and Virtue among Men. For as that Doctrine is delivered by our Saviour, it is certainly so far from being a matter of mere Speculation, that it is the great foundation of, and the greatest

[17]

est engagement to a virtuous holy Life, that was possible to be given. We own it is a *Mystery*, and a great one, but not an useless speculative *Mystery*, but a *Mystery of Godliness* (as the Apostle styles it.) God Almighty did not reveal that *Mystery* to us as a piece of Philosophy, for the filling our Heads with new sublime Notions about his Nature: But as a Principle or Hypothesis, absolutely necessary for the right understanding the Structure and Contrivance of the Gospel-Dispensation. Wherein discovering in how wonderful a manner, each Person in the Divine Essence was severally engaged in the great Affair of bringing Men into Repentance: We might in the first place have abundant reason to embrace and adhere to that Religion, in which alone of all the Religions in the World, was a method discovered, of reconciling Men to God without injury to any of the Divine Attributes, or violence done to the liberty of Mans Will: And Secondly, might have the strongest Engagements imaginable, seriously to set our selves upon the great Work of the reformation of our Lives, for the effecting of which, both Father, Son and Holy Ghost had so zealously, and with such astonishing Condescension concerned themselves.

When we therefore consider the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, as an Article of the Christian Faith; we are not barely to consider it, as it denotes or expresses *three Eternal, Divine Persons subsisting in one Divine Nature*; much less are we to trouble our heads with the manner of the emanation of one Person from another, and other such things, (with their curious inquiries into, and definitions about which;

some (it is to be feared) instead of clearing, have rather obscured and perplexed that sacred Mystery: But we are to consider this Mystery, as the Holy Scripture proposeth it; namely, every Person as conversant about, and co-operating in the work of our Redemption. God the *Father*, as having an infinite compassion and kindness for lost Mankind, and thereupon sending his Son to restore them: God the *Son* as taking Human Nature upon him, that by his *Life* he might both instruct us in God's Will, and be to us an example of Living; and by his *Death*, he might make a Propitiation for our Sins: And lastly, God the *Holy Ghost*, as sent into the Hearts of all Believers to be a new Principle in them of a Divine Life; to assist all well-disposed Persons with his Grace to the end of the World, in the subduing their Corruptions, and in the performance of all that Obedience which Christ had required of them. And certainly the Doctrine of the *Trinity* thus believed, thus considered, is a foundation of Piety with a witness: A Doctrine that carries in it the strongest Arguments that can possibly be made use of to a reasonable Nature, to oblige us to give up our selves entirely to the Service of God.

But in the third place pass we from the *Doctrines* our Saviour taught, to the *Life* he liv'd in the World; which will afford us another undeniable proof of the point we are upon. For whoever considers the particulars of that Life as it is recorded in the Gospels, cannot but be convinced, that it was wholly framed to the purposes of teaching universal virtue to Mankind, by giving us a most lively;
and

and yet a most imitable example of all the branches of it.

The life that our blessed Lord led upon Earth, was full of Innocence and Simplicity, free from all manner of Guile, and from the least suspicion of Vice, or any thing that looked like it. There was nothing in his Temper, or in his Conversation, that savoured of Sourness, or Churlishness; of Vain-glory, or Ambition, or Self-seeking; of the love of Pleasure, or of the love of the World. On the contrary, he was the reverse of all these; being the modestest, the humblest, the best-natured, the most self-denying, and disinterested Man that ever appear'd in the World. He had no views in any of his Actions; but the pure glory of God, and the good of Mankind. He was dead to the World while he liv'd in it; very well pleased and contented with his low Condition; extremely devout towards God, and conversing much with him by Prayer and Meditation, and yet making that no pretence of neglecting the business of his Calling. He bore Injuries and Affronts with the greatest Meekness, tho' he was a Person of the highest Quality in the World. Patient he was to Admiration, under unheard of Sufferings, and not only ready to forgive his Enemies, but to oblige them all the ways they were capable.

It would be endless to pursue all the Instances of that glorious Virtue, in which our Saviour shined forth as a light to the Paths, and a Lantern to the feet of all the Ages and Generations of the World. I shall therefore here only desire leave to take notice,

how exquisitely the Circumstances of our Saviour's Life were contrived, for the rending him every way a compleat and proper example of Virtue to the Sons of Men. And there are *two* Particulars especially that make hither.

First, His chusing the Life of a private ordinary Person. Had he appeared in the Quality, and with the Equipage of a Prince, or some such Illustrious Personage (as indeed the *Jews* expected such a one for their *Messias*) and framed his Manners and Conversation according to that Character: The Virtues and Graces he must then have chiefly exercised, would not have been imitable by much the greater part of Mankind; as who, being placed in a quite different Sphere, must also have different Patterns and Precedents to frame their Lives by; and consequently, the benefit of his Example would have redounded comparatively but to a few. Besides, that state of Life would not have led him to opportunities of exemplifying several Virtues, which the generality of Mankind have the most frequent occasions for; and for the obtaining of which, by reason of their extreme difficulty, they most stand in need of the guidance and encouragement of an example. Such for instance are, contentedness in a mean fortune, a continual dependence on God's Providence; patient suffering of Injuries and Persecutions, with several of the like Nature. But now our Saviour appearing as he did in lowly and common Circumstances, in that Rank and Quality into which the Lot of the greatest part of Men is cast; and therein continually conflicting with all those Difficulties and Temptations,

to

to which the condition of Human Life is most exposed; he rendered himself hereby an Example of the most universal Influence, such a copy of Virtue as the necessities of Mankind did most require, should be given them to write after.

Again Secondly, what I have observed as to the outward condition of our Saviour's Life, the same, and to the same purposes I observe of his Virtues. They were indeed perfect in the highest Degree, but yet the Instances of them were very ordinary and very familiar; complying with Human Society, and proportioned to the Strength and Capacities of all Men. There was nothing of Prodigy in his Conversation: nothing that by its greatness and too much Lustre, might rather dazle our Eyes than guide us, rather scare our endeavours than encourage them. And herein differs the Story of our Lord, from that of several of his Followers and Disciples in after times. Whose Lives as they are related to us, are rather fit to fright and amaze us, to ensnare and to create scruples in us; than to conduct us in the ways of an even and regular Piety. But our Saviour's Life was nothing so. We do not find him forward in those prodigious Mortifications, those long and tedious abstractions of Spirit, those strange Instances of uncommanded Charity, with which the Legends of the Saints are stuffed. But in all the Actions in which he did propose himself imitable by us, he did so converse with Men, that Men might with ease and pleasure, and without the least prejudice to their secular Affairs, converse in the World after his Example. In a word, his whole Life was perfectly framed to a
con-

conformity with his Doctrine, and Articles of Faith. As these were fitted to every Mans Understanding, so was that fitted for every ones Imitation.

Nay, let me add this farther ; His very Miracles and inimitable Actions were also framed as much as was possible for the carrying on this Design. For they were all of such a Quality, that they did not only evidence the Divine Authority of his Religion to Mens understandings, which was one great end of them ; but did also powerfully recommend Goodness and Charity to their Practices. We might in them, at the same time discover both the truth of Christianity, and the Spirit and Temper of it. For it is observable of all the great and wonderful Works that our Saviour wrought, that they were not mere Signs and Prodigies, such as the carnal *Jews* hankered after ; but Actions of Beneficence to Mankind ; Illustrious Expressions of the most large and diffusive Charity. He never exerted that Divine Power that was in him, but to the ends of benefiting some Person or other. His constant course of Miracles, was but a continual going about doing good.

And herein remarkably appears the difference between our Saviour's Miracles, and those of *Moses* and *Elias* ; the one the Author, the other the great restorer of the Jewish Law. Theirs were for the most part vindicative and destructive ; dreadful plagues and judgments upon Gain-sayers, ; Waters from the deep to drown them, and Fire from Heaven to consume them ; and this suitably enough to the Nature and Genius of that Dispensation, to which they

they did hereby gain Authority. But our Saviour, who came to infuse another kind of Spirit into Mankind, chose to confirm his Religion by Miracles of Mercy; by healing the Sick, feeding the Hungry, opening the eyes of the Blind, casting out Devils, and raising dead People to Life again: Plainly hereby making us to understand, that the great business of his Religion, was to make Men kind and good-natur'd; and to produce in them all the fruits of an useful and charitable Conversation, and this in a degree far higher, than either the Law of *Moses*, or any other Religion in the World did oblige Men to.

And thus much for our Saviour's Life and Example, which was the third Head I was to speak to. As for the two remaining parts of his History, which I mentioned, as further proofs of the point we are upon; I shall not now meddle with them, having (I fear) been too tedious already. And therefore I only beg leave to draw two short Inferences from what hath been said, and I shall conclude.

And first, If this Account we have given of the Ends of Christ's Manifestation in the Flesh be a true one; then we may learn, what Judgment we are to make of all such Doctrines and Opinions, as do either directly teach Vice and Profaneness and careless Living, or by necessary Consequence open a door to it: Of all such Doctrines as dispose a Man to believe, either that holiness of Life is not necessary to Salvation; or at least not so necessary, but that there may be ways found out to supply the want:

want of it: Of all such Doctrines as do check and discourage Men's endeavours after universal Virtue, either by representing it unto them, as a thing unattainable in this Life; or by filling their minds with hard, and unworthy, and penurious thoughts of God and his Goodness: Of all such Doctrines as tend to extinguish the inward Life and Spirit of Religion, by turning it into Customariness, or Formality, or Superstition: In a word, of all those Doctrines that do any way hinder or obstruct good Life. For it is certain we may affirm of all such, that they are not of God; that Christ never taught them; that the Holy Scripture in the true sense of it, cannot possibly own them, as being directly contradictory to the great design and intendment of it, which, as we have seen, is to plant in Men all manner of Virtue and Holy Conversation.

This is an excellent Rule to examine the truth of Religious Opinions by; and may be of great use for the guiding our Judgments as to many Points, which are with great eagerness disputed among Christians at this day. And I mention it, not without a particular reflection upon many of the Doctrines taught in the Church of *Rome*; and upon some, likewise, that are too much propagated among our selves, (though, God be thanked, never owned by our Church:) Both of which sorts, if they be brought to this Test, will appear manifestly false and unchristian: As being either apparently contrived to serve a secular Turn; or if not that, yet all of them, directly, or by necessary consequence, encouraging Men in a careless or a vitious Life.

But

[25]

(words of a late Eminent Divine of our Church)
 But Secondly, since the End and Design of our
 Lord's coming into the World, is such as hath been
 said; then, in the Name of God, let every one that
names the Name of Christ, depart from all Iniquity.
 This is the most natural Inference that can be drawn
 from this Doctrine.

All of us here present do call our selves Christi-
 ans, nay, and I believe, would take it ill of any
 one that should think otherwise of us. For God's sake
 then, let us make it appear that we are so, by living
 up to the design of our Christianity. Let us show
 that we are indeed the Disciples of Christ, by walk-
 ing as we have him for an Example. Let us make
 all the World see that we believe his Doctrines, by
 conforming our selves to his Precepts: That we fear
 his threatnings, by flying every thing that is base
 and sinful: That we expect his Rewards in the o-
 ther World, by living above the Vanities of this.
 Let our constant and vigorous pursuit of every thing
 that is Good, of every thing that is Just, of every
 thing that is Lovely, that is Venerable, that is of
 good Report, bear Witness for us, to what Master,
 and to what Religion we do belong,

There is no other way but this to Evidence, that
 we are indeed what we pretend to be. It is not
 sufficient to entitle us to the name of Christians,
 that we were baptized into Christ, that we profess his
 Faith, that we rest upon him for Salvation, that we
 are Members of an Orthodox Church: No, what
 St. Paul said of *Circumcision*, the same may be said
 of *Baptism*, and all those other things, (I use the

E

words

words of a late, Eminent Divine of our Church)
They do verily profit, if we keep the Law of Christ,
 but if we be transgressors of that Law, our *Baptism*
 is no Baptism; our *Faith* is mere Infidelity, our
 Christianity is no better than Heathenism. Nay,
 further, I will be bold to say, there is not a *Turk* or a
Heathen, but if he live better than we; if he be more
 Innocent, more Chaste, more Humble, more Just,
 more Charitable than we, he is to all intents and pur-
 poses a better Christian. Forasmuch as he lives more
 up to the Ends of Christ's Religion. And a thou-
 sand times rather would I chuse to appear at the last
 day before the great Tribunal of God in the Person of
 such a poor Infidel, than in the Condition of the
 most Orthodox Christian, if he soil and unhallow
 his Profession by a vicious Life. God Almighty
 touch all our Hearts with a sense of these things, and
 grant that *that* Grace of his, which as on this day
hath appeared unto Men, may effectually teach every
 one of us to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to
 live righteously, and soberly, and godly in this present
 World; looking for the blessed Hope, and the second
 and more glorious appearance of the great God and our
 Saviour, To whom, &c.



FINIS.